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# The World in Transition: A Comparative Analysis of Youth Perceptions in China and America

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THE WORLD IN TRANSITION:  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF YOUTH PERCEPTIONS  
IN CHINA & AMERICA

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Tyler D. Prochazka

\*\*\*\*\*

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2014

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## ABSTRACT

Many scholars have argued, over the next two decades China will rise while the United States begins a relative decline. Today's youth will eventually become the next generation of leaders and policymakers. Thus, understanding youth's perceptions of these trends can help provide insight into how they will shape the future Sino-U.S. relationship and their state's standing in the world. This research found that the youth in China were optimistic toward their country's prospects in the international community compared to their American counterparts. The relative optimism among the Chinese has made them more willing to participate in global affairs and institutions compared to American youth. Increased media exposure regarding the Sino-U.S. relationship correlated with greater negative perceptions of their counterpart's country between both the Americans and Chinese. However, Americans and Chinese youth that had learned more than one language had greater positive perceptions and willingness to cooperate with their counterpart's country.

Keywords: China's rise, Sino-U.S. relationship, American hegemony, youth perceptions, America's decline, Multilateralism

Dedicated to  
My father & the WKU Forensics Team

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2014.....	Ken. Gov. Steve Beshear Appointed Ken. Colonel

## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field 1: International Affairs

Major Field 2: Asian Religions and Cultures

Minor Field: Economics

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A=American Youth, C=Chinese Youth

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The complex and habitually tense relationship between the United States and China is likely to become the most influential and consequential relationship of the 21st century. As the world watches China's dramatic rise and some perceive a simultaneous decline of America, how these two superpowers react to the rapidly changing balance of power will have substantial consequences for the stability of the international system. An often overlooked component of this process is forecasting the beliefs and attitudes of the next generation of policymakers and leaders from both sides. Understanding and comparing the attitudes of today's youth in China and the United States can provide a window to predicting how both countries will interact by the time the this generation sets the prevailing ideology for policy formation. Amidst a perceived shift in global power, Chinese youth are relatively optimistic regarding China's ascent, and American youth are pessimistic regarding America's decline. These perceptions are reflected in the shift of Chinese youth toward an outward, international focus in China's policies, while American youth shift toward an inward, domestic focus. That is to say, American youth have a greater interest in domestic policies relative to their interest in global military engagements while Chinese youth are more willing to increase China's global role. As they begin shifting into leadership and policy making roles, youth on both sides have the potential to reshape the policies of their countries with these newfound perceptions. At

the same time, both sides' youth are committed to preserving bilateral cooperation, even though their priorities are significantly different. This research suggests that increasing multilingual education among the youth would improve the relationship between the United States and China. Chinese and American youth that learned more than one language were more willing to cooperate with the other side's country and had more positive overall perceptions toward their counterpart's country. However, simply increasing knowledge regarding the other side is ineffective to maintain the bilateral relationship. Greater exposure to media that covered the Sino-U.S. relationship increased negative perceptions of the other side's country among both Chinese and American youth.

### *Youth Significance*

Youth, which this research defines people between 18 to 25 years old, are often overlooked in the study of Sino-U.S. relations and international affairs in general, but their potential contributions to the makeup of the relationship and their inevitable shaping of the future are nonetheless significant. In the past, youth have significantly impacted the way their communities think and act (Yohalem and Martin 809-810). In turn, this influence provides an avenue for youth to impact how older generations think about foreign policy and shape their attitudes toward China or America. For example, in China there is an increasing frequency of political demonstrations in which young people are playing a crucial part (Ash 44). In a system without competitive democratic elections, Chinese youth have found ways to project their voice -- especially in the era of social media. Several outcries over social media have led to changes in official government policy (Qiu 2009). As social media and independent publishers continue to gain traction

with Chinese citizens, the influence of the Chinese public on its officials will likely grow. According to Maria Repnikova, “Once public opinion matures...it might play a more active role as a direct feedback mechanism” (Repnikova).

While American youth are also limited in their scale of influence, it is important not to overlook the role they play in current foreign policy discussions. Placing the youth in the context of the current U.S. political sphere paints a bleak picture for its engagement, where 63 percent of young people have said they “rarely or never discuss” politics (Kahne and Middaugh 55). At the same time, like in China, there have been outbursts of widespread youth engagement, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement (Nichols 5), or more recently protests over police brutality. As such, even though youth political participation is on average relatively low, issue-based political movements are still often lead by youth, and the intensity of those youth who do participate is quite high.

When crafting foreign policy, presidents are known to be at least partially sensitive to public preferences (Knecht 204-205). The Kony 2012 campaign, largely driven by youth on social media, offers a unique example of how youth influenced the Obama administration’s foreign policy with Uganda. Most significantly, presidents are most sensitive to the views of public opinion regarding conflict and the decision to go to war (Knecht 209). With China’s rise and increasing territorial claims creating the potential specter of conflict, the way in which the public -- and youth specifically -- view China is an important factor to consider when predicting whether the president will ever choose to engage in war or increase troop deployment in the Asia-Pacific.

*Chinese Political Engagement*

The youth's potential ability to affect foreign policy should be analyzed in the context of their current levels of political engagement. There is a sense that the current generation of China is not particularly interested in politics, and many Chinese youth are apathetic toward the government (Ash 43). Moreover, the pursuit of material possessions often trumps politics in importance for many Chinese youth (Ash 43). This is not unexpected in a system that does not provide direct elections for central authorities, and any elections that occur are systematically manipulated by the Communist Party (Zhang and Lin 23).

However, there are two reasons why the perception of youth apathy in China does not undermine their significance over the short and long term. First, Chinese students feel generally dissatisfied with their occupations, or lack thereof, and feel increasingly entitled to political rights (Ash 44). As China struggles to maintain the rapid levels of growth as it has in the past, this could give rise to a younger generation that is increasingly resentful of China's political system and slowing economic conditions. Second, the apathy of today's youth does not necessarily indicate that they will remain this way in the future. Many Chinese youth are instructed by their parents to "leave politics alone." However, with the greater independence that accompanies adulthood, growing resentment could undermine this family-taught apolitical philosophy.

#### *American Political Engagement*

Many people harbor a similar concern regarding American youth's lack of political engagement. A lack of youth political participation now suggests to some that the general population in the future may have less impact on shaping foreign policy if apathy takes hold. According to Kahne and Middaugh, over half of Americans under 30

were disinterested in politics, and 63 percent rarely talk about politics with others face to face (55). Moreover, less than half of people between the ages 18 and 25 voted in 2012 (“Youth”). However, research suggests that this apathy among many young voters is temporary and that they will become more active once they enter adulthood (Flanagan and Levine 161). Furthermore, young adults are more civically engaged than adults in certain areas, such as global activism (Flanagan and Levine 162). This delay theory suggests that over the long term the current generation will eventually increase its political activism and will focus on international issues in particular.

### *Attitude Shaping*

In order to fully understand the perceptions of American and Chinese youth, it is important to also understand the underlying reasons how and why their attitudes have been shaped this way. In a broad sense, across cultures an intergenerational value shift is usually triggered by a change in the security, economic, and political conditions of a given country (Niv-Solomon 10). For instance, if the population believes their country is secure militarily, the next generation is more likely to prioritize economic development. If the population’s economic needs are met, a society may focus more heavily on “post-materialist” values, like environmental protection and civil rights (Niv-Solomon 10). The idea of the “transmission belt,” which states that older generations’ views are embedded in the minds of younger generations’ views, is invalidated under this theory (Niv-Solomon 14). In essence, each generation’s value system is shaped primarily by their unique experiences and independent learning during their childhood, rather than by their parents (Niv-Solomon 14). This realization is important because it means that the next



generation of leaders will not be merely a photocopy of the current generation in power, but rather one that was shaped by its own problems and cultural influences.

### *Chinese Attitude Shaping*

Chinese youth are inundated with an array of inputs that shape their perception of domestic and foreign affairs. The Communist Chinese Party has attempted to ensure that the traditional modes of influence continue to shape the youth in a way that is favorable to the one-party state. The CCP Propaganda Department, or *Zhongyang Xuanchuan Bu*, censors an array of different mediums and transmits information that is favorable to the state (Shambaugh 27-29). The primary mechanism for censorship is through “self-discipline,” which relies on individuals to personally refrain from posting controversial commentary. “Self-discipline” has become an effective form of indirect suppression since many in China have internalized this self-censorship (Shambaugh 29; Wallis 420). There are two “traditional” mediums that the CCP utilizes to disseminate its message to youth: education and mass media.

First, after the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, the Chinese began mandating political education classes in schools to improve attitudes toward the state and move the youth away from Westernized political systems (Shengluo 14). In a study that reviewed various factors influencing students’ ideologies, political education classes were the least or nearly the least influential, yet they still led students to have a higher affinity for the state than they would have otherwise (Shengluo 27, 33). Second, the CCP has “guided” public opinion for decades through mass media platforms, such as traditional newscasts and news outlets (Luo 1290). These platforms have effectively increased public regard of the CCP and its policies (Luo 1290). Both of these propaganda mechanisms have come

under assault by new forms of media that allow non-state entities to set the agenda. Especially among those in urban areas, a decreasing number of Chinese citizens are susceptible to propaganda from state agencies (Shambaugh 55). As a result, the power to influence public opinion has shifted from the CCP and toward independent media and social media platforms that often exercise autonomy from the state (Luo 1294).

While the CCP still has substantial influence over public opinion, it must now compete with the rest of the Internet (Luo 1307). Text messaging, anonymizing tools, such as VPNs, and other workarounds have given youth activists a space to challenge the CCP's narrative and influence the attitudes of other youth (Wallis 420, 422). While unsuccessful, the attempted "Jasmine Revolution," which was a series of Arab Spring inspired pro-democracy protests throughout China, demonstrates the power of youth in subverting the Great Firewall (Zhang and Nyiri 124). Over time, these attitudes toward the government will likely carry over into adulthood -- at least in the sense that the youth are better able to freely form their beliefs outside the control of the state.

### *American Attitude Shaping*

Similar to Chinese youth, American youth also have an abundance of inputs constantly competing to influence their attitudes and perceptions. In the early years of a child's development of their political beliefs, parental ideology plays a prominent role (Hatemi et al. 1151). However, parental influence over their child's political ideology diminishes over time, especially as they move into young adulthood (Hatemi et al. 1151). With the ascent of the Internet, other traditional mechanisms of spreading political ideas have declined in the United States. For example, civic education in the United States has been less frequently taught in the public education system (CIRCLE 14). This helps

demonstrate how difficult it is for the American government to directly shape the attitudes of the current generation through the public school system. In the past, mediums like broadcast radio played a role in creating “ideological synthesis,” whereas opinions were relatively aligned among the youth (Yang 22), yet radio use has also declined precipitously.

The vacuum left by old modes of influence has largely been filled by social media. About 41 percent of youth have been found to have participated in online political activities (Kahne and Middaugh 52). Youth’s participation in online social media a “collective unconscious” has emerged (Yang 18). Yang describes this “collective unconscious” as the multiplicity of individual messages that all culminate in creating one informal discourse (18). It is through this discourse that the will of youth can be manifested in challenging dominant ideologies (Yang 18).

### *Future Impact*

While the current perceptions of youth toward foreign policy may have an impact on the current formulation of policy, as outlined above, this paper’s primary concern will be analyzing their current attitudes to predict future policies. According to Niv-Solomon, the youth are likely to maintain many of their current beliefs as they transition into adulthood (13). In fact, once people enter adulthood, they are much less likely to alter their political attitudes and beliefs (Niv-Solomon 14). That is, it is likely that the attitudes of today’s youth will be the same general attitudes they harbor in adulthood; it is also likely that these attitudes will become increasingly rigid over time. For this reason, analyzing youth’s current perceptions can provide researchers with a reasonable prediction of how policy may be formulated in the future. Thus, this paper will draw

broad conclusions about how these comparative perceptions of U.S. and Chinese youth, as the likely framework for future policy making, will influence the direction of the Sino-American relationship and the actions of the US and China as individual states.

The specific commitment levels of American and Chinese youth toward their political attitudes throughout their lives may be one limitation of this study; The commitment toward these beliefs represent an important area for future study to determine precisely how reliable current opinions of youth can be for predicting future perceptions. Moreover, the intensity of the youth's beliefs and how likely they are to lobby for their preferred policies are beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, Niv-Solomon's research indicates that opinion samples of the youth can still provide valuable insight into understanding the policy effects of this generation's perceptions.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

The data below stem from a year-long survey process that began with a series of focus groups in Beijing, China. Responses from the Chinese focus groups are separate from the statistics which illustrate the results of an online survey. Focus group responses provided alongside the survey data are intended to give human context to the data. These focus group responses were translated with the assistance of a native Chinese speaker. The focus groups were conducted over two months and consisted of three separate groups of five participants each, for a total of 15 participants. The focus group participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their perceptions of the future of the United States and China. The direction of the questions for each of the groups varied based on the answers of the particular focus group. The focus group data is a convenience sample; all participants were Beijing Normal University (BNU) students between 18-25 years old and were citizens of the People's Republic of China. Respondents were selected with the help of BNU School of Politics and International Relations Vice Dean Shengjun Zhang and his graduate assistant Xiwen Li, who contacted individuals they knew at BNU. All respondents were compensated with \$10 USD. The initial purpose of the focus groups was to provide a direction for constructing the subsequent survey questions, as it provided a framework to test if the perceptions of the focus groups were representative among a larger group. Additionally, it was useful in providing the ability to cross-

examine the participants and comprehensively understand their views prior to constructing the survey questions. While the data from the focus group are not necessarily intended to be nationally representative of the youth in China, BNU attracts students from across the mainland which should provide enough diversity to derive the subsequent survey questions.

For the survey, all respondents were also between 18-25 years old in order to represent the stage of youth prior to full adulthood, but also the stage when most political opinions have already been formed. This age range serves as the definition of “youth” for both the Chinese and American data. All survey respondents were citizens of the People’s Republic of China or the United States. Chinese students received a survey with both English and Chinese versions of the questions. The survey questions were derived from the focus group answers and were not the same as those given to the focus group. Translations of the questions were reviewed by native Chinese speakers. All of the questions can be reviewed in full, in Chinese and English, in the appendix below. Several methods were employed to collect data, but the bulk of data was retrieved from two services: Qualtrics and MTurk for Chinese and American responses respectively. These services help individuals find qualified participants for their surveys.

Other methods to collect survey data included Facebook promotion on pages related to international clubs to attract both Chinese and American respondents, as well as promotion on Facebook groups for Chinese citizens. In the United States, participants were entered into a raffle to win a \$50 gift card if they took the survey, and this was promoted through posters around the campus at Western Kentucky University. In total, there were 141 Chinese responses and 150 American responses, with varying response

levels for each question since respondents could opt not to answer all of the questions. This is a convenience sample, as it was promoted through available channels that did not necessarily formulate a nationally representative sample. However, the survey data still comes from an array of regions throughout both the United States and China as reflected in the IP data that accompanied the survey data. This was accomplished through promotion of the survey in several regions in both countries, and through the Qualtrics and MTurk purchases, which received responses from a variety of locations in both countries. Incorporating a variety of regions helps ensure the data is not regionally biased even though it is a convenience sample.

Some responses in the survey data were omitted if they were not citizens of the target country, were not in the proper age range, or if they did not pass focus questions. Focus questions required respondents to demonstrate that they were fully reading the questions and answers, and if they failed the question all of their responses were flagged and deleted. For example, participants were asked to choose “very likely” if they were paying attention. If they chose any other answer, all of their responses were manually removed and they were immediately booted from the survey. To ensure compliance with the required demographics of the survey, responses which showed an IP address outside of the United States or China were flagged and the respondents were contacted to provide proof of citizenship. If there was no contact information, they did not respond or could not produce proper identification, their responses were deleted from survey data.

### *Limitations*

One limitation of this data is that it more likely reflects *relatively* affluent Chinese youth. This is due to the fact that affluent youth have greater access to the Internet, which

is necessary to participate in the online survey. This may distort the data toward affluent Chinese youth views. For instance, affluent youth may be more willing to prioritize the environment over a government safety net than less affluent youth. However, less affluent Chinese youth without access to the Internet will likely have less influence over policy discussions than affluent youth that do have access. These limitations may exist for American data as well, however the skew is likely smaller since the disparity in Internet access in the United States is not as dramatic.

Another limitation of this survey exists in questions regarding language proficiency. The survey may be unrepresentative of the actual percentages of individuals that study a second language. In the United States, 21 percent of Americans say they are speak a language other than English at home (Camarota and Zeigler), whereas 45 percent of American youth in this survey report learning a foreign language. In China, around one-third of the country is learning English alone (Brock), whereas 85 percent of Chinese youth in this survey were language learners. However, this discrepancy does not account for generational differences or the amount of other second languages the Chinese may be learning. Additionally, these high percentages of language learners may be influenced by a high number of college student participation in the survey, since many colleges require or encourage studying a foreign language. As will be discussed, second language learning correlates with a change in attitudes. Thus, this data may be skewed by the high amounts of language learners in both groups. Moreover, this data cannot account for reverse causality regarding the impact of language learning on perceptions of other countries.

The primary limitations of this data are the relatively small sample sizes to the overall youth populations in both states and that they are both convenience samples. Even



with these limitations, the diversity in where the responses originated, as well as the variety of methods of promotion should allow the results to provide preliminary insight into gauging the perceptions of youth in China and America. In particular, even with a small convenience sample, this data should still be large enough to provide contrast in the general leanings of both sides' perceptions.

## CHAPTER 3

### GENERAL MUTUAL ATTITUDES

#### *A Potential Challenger*

Between the overall populations in China and the United States, the general perceptions between both sides illustrate many of the difficulties and opportunities for the Sino-U.S. relationship in the status quo. The following research provides a window into the current attitudes between the overall population and government officials to provide a potential comparison point for the attitudes amongst these countries' youth.

For Americans, the Chinese government and the country as a whole elicit a wide range of responses. Since the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, however, positive attitudes toward China have not recovered, as America's view of China has slowly turned negative over the years (Dugan; Perlez). At the same time, many Americans have already come to see China as the leading global economic power (Dugan). While it would appear that these tendencies combined may fuel a pushback against the rise of China, more Americans reported seeing China as a friend than as a foe (Dugan). Nonetheless, the attitude of many in the U.S. military is to view China as a potential challenger and thus feel it necessary to contain their rise (Li 1). Coupled with the narrative of China taking away American jobs, a negative portrayal of China has emerged in much of American media (Perlez). In fact, Pan argues the emerging paradigm toward China in the United

States is defined by the “China Threat” theory, particularly since the demise of the Soviet Union (23-24). That is, Pan argues China has been discursively constructed by American analysts as a threat to the American dominated world order and its accompanying stability.

Many analysts in and outside of government believe that the United States and China are locked in a power struggle for control of the international system. Friedberg explains that the current rivalry is not just about misperceptions, but rather the structure of the international system itself (18). China’s status as an authoritarian regime, and America’s status as a democratic system also fuels distrust between both governments (Friedberg 21). This chasm in their government systems creates an impediment to long-term cooperation between the two countries (Friedberg 21). Even though many elites in both countries believe China and the United States are tense “competitors,” only a minority of government elites in both countries go so far as to label the other side an “enemy” (“U.S.-China” 10-11). However, substantially more Chinese government elites than U.S. government elites labeled the other side an enemy, at 27 percent and 2 percent respectively (“U.S.-China” 11).

Contradictory feelings among the Chinese public and governmental elite are abound. On one hand, the Chinese are impressed by American culture, especially movies and music (NCUSCR). At the same time, many are alienated by U.S. foreign policy, which they see as the United States acting as the world’s police (NCUSCR). On a governmental level, China is intent on deciphering the underlying strategy of the U.S. government (Nathan and Scobell). In all, in recent years the Communist Party tends to view U.S. actions in East Asia as a form of containment by a “capitalist” power (Nathan

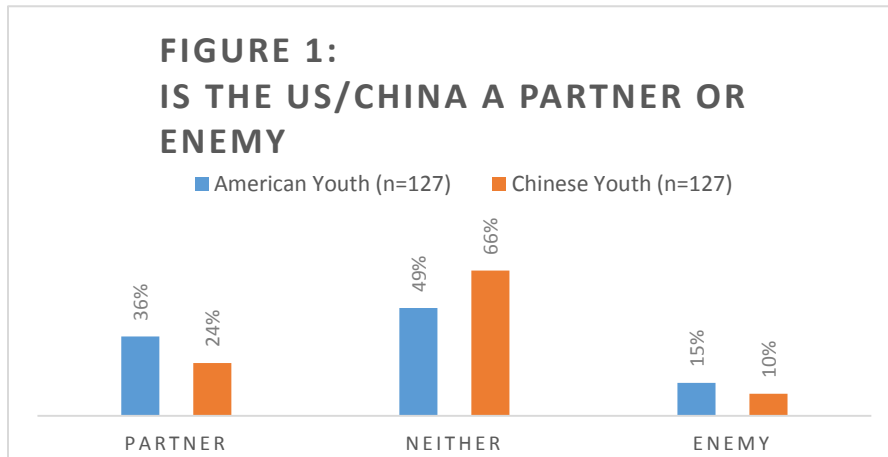
and Scobell). The military establishment in China takes a similar hardline stance as its American military counterpart. Military strategists often recommend that China should take a more confrontational position against U.S. policies they see as holding back China's rise (Nathan and Scobell). For example, U.S. support for Taiwan and other policies are seen through this lens (Nathan and Scobell). This animosity has resulted in Chinese governmental elites being far more likely than the Chinese public to label the United States an "enemy" ("U.S.-China" 11). Moreover, Chinese elites are even much more likely than American elites to label their counterpart an "enemy" ("U.S.-China" 11). As such, it appears that mistrust is more deeply embedded on the Chinese side than it is on the American side, meaning that American foreign policymakers have to be especially cautious in how their policies toward China will be perceived. Interestingly, the data from the Carnegie Endowment suggests youth in both countries were more reflective of scholars' higher level of trust toward the other country ("U.S.-China" 9).

### *Comparisons and Implications*

The general mutual perceptions of Chinese and American illustrates some areas of concern and optimism for the bilateral relationship:

- Chinese and American youth largely refuse to label their counterpart a partner or an enemy
- Both sides label each other their biggest threat, but American youth's perception of threat is far more diffuse than Chinese youth
- Strong majorities of both are willing to increase bilateral economic cooperation

- Americans are hesitant to increase bilateral military cooperation, while a strong majority of Chinese are willing to increase military cooperation
- Substantial amounts of Chinese and American youth think their counterpart will use military force

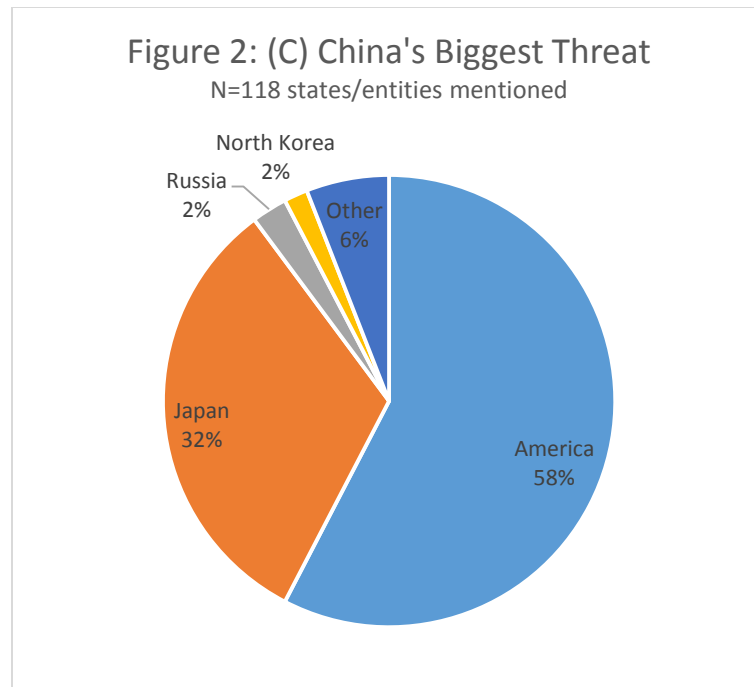


When labeling their counterpart a partner or an enemy, Chinese and American youth have a similar trend. What stands out is the large portion of both sides that chose to label them neither a partner nor enemy (see figure 1). This has a few explanations. For the Chinese youth, this potentially illustrates a “Golden Mean,” or *zhongyong* approach among the Chinese youth in its perception of the United States. The Golden Mean is Confucian ideal that is meant to convey a balance between two extremes (Xiao and Carlson 203). This ideal has already been incorporated into aspects of China’s foreign policy toward the United States (Xiao and Carlson 203), and this framework may have trickled down to the Chinese youth as well. In fact, Chinese youth are even more likely to take the “Golden Mean” approach regarding foreign policy than the broader public. A 2013 Pew study found that 31 percent of the Chinese public thought the United States

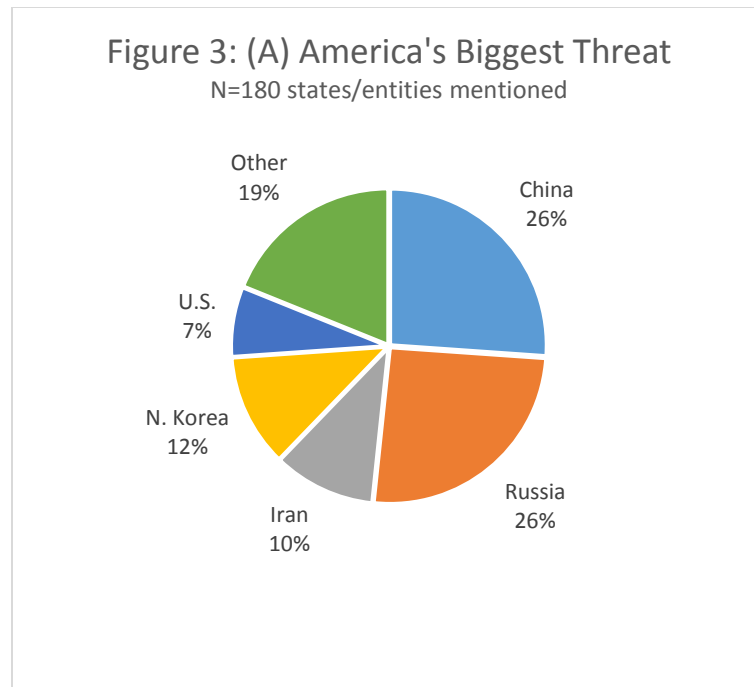
had neither a cooperative nor a hostile relationship with China (Horowitz et al. 13). This accounts for nearly half of the Chinese youth in this survey.

On the American side, similar results were found among the general public in the Pew survey and youth in this survey: majorities of both chose “neither” when classifying China as a partner or enemy (Horowitz et al. 26). And, youth in this survey were also consistent with the general public when labeling China an enemy as well, as both the general public and youth in this survey were mostly reticent about using this label (Horowitz et al. 26). However, both Pew and this survey found that American youth are more likely than the general public to label China a partner (Horowitz et al. 26; “U.S. Public”).

It is important to note that differences between the 2012 Pew survey, the question was worded to include the label of competitor in addition to partner and enemy (“U.S. Public”). With this addition, majorities among all ages chose to label China as a competitor (“U.S. Public”). The lack of “competitor” as an option in this survey may have caused American youth to label China as an “enemy” instead. This research chose the 2013 Pew survey as the framework, which did not include competitor as an option because it forced the respondents to either respond in stark terms, partner or enemy, or place China in neither category. That is to say, individuals that have substantially different views toward China may both choose competitor. As such, this framework forces respondents to articulate which direction their feelings lean, and if they truly lean in neither direction then that is reflected though “neither.”



While the majority of Chinese youth refused to label the United States an outright “enemy,” the majority of them still listed the United States as the biggest threat to China (see figure 2). Japan was the second most listed, but with about half the number of the United States. This is significant considering the China’s history with Japan and their current tensions over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Besides Japan and the United States, all other countries were far down the list. Some listed two or more countries as the biggest threat, and these numbers reflect every instance of a country being mentioned. The Chinese focus group sessions suggest that these numbers reflect animosity toward U.S. foreign policy in East Asia, as this is perceived by many Chinese youth to be targeted at China. One focus participant said “America should control its army and stop spreading it around the world.” Several others indicated that the United States should not interfere in the dispute over Taiwan.



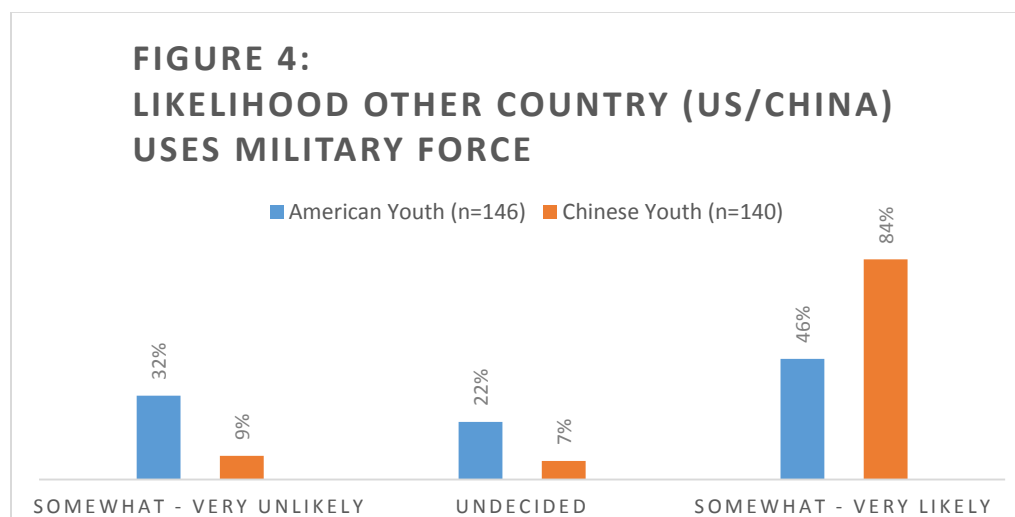
On the American side, a large number of American youth perceive China as the biggest threat to the United States. This widespread perception illustrates that the China threat theory criticized by Pan is at least somewhat accepted by American youth (see figure 3). This is consistent with the general population, 40 percent of which labeled China a threat in the 2012 Chicago Council study (“Global Views” 6). The Chicago Council question differed somewhat from this survey. It asked whether or not China was a threat in general, while this survey asked respondents to only list the greatest threat. This was to gauge the seriousness with which respondents view specific threats.

Although China is seen as the biggest state threat, overall American youth see the threats to the United States as diffuse. China essentially ties Russia in number of mentions among the youth in this survey. Other states like North Korea and Iran were also mentioned frequently in this survey. Russia’s prominence on this particular survey

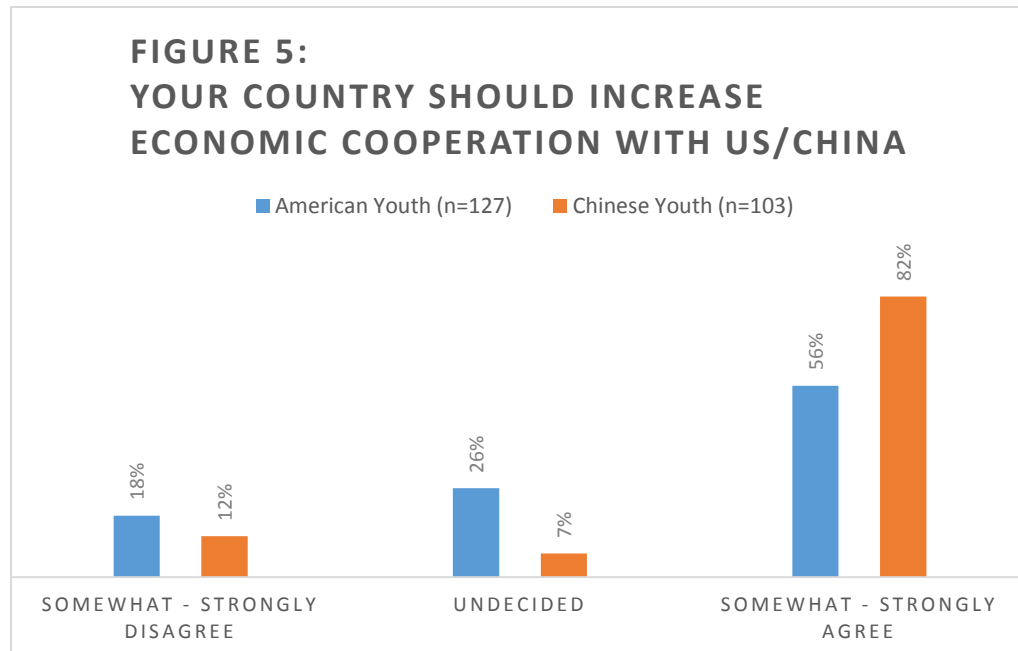


may be influenced by the recent events in Eastern Europe, since much of the data collection took place during the ongoing dispute in Ukraine.

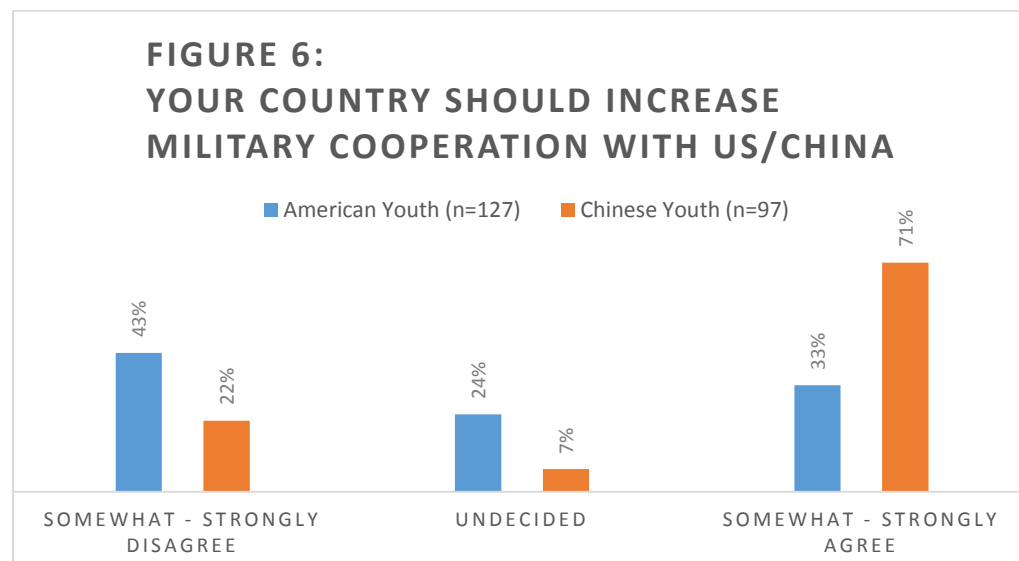
Despite hesitancy among both groups in labeling their counterpart an enemy, both sides' youth labelled the other side their country's greatest threat. However, Chinese youth were substantially more likely to label the United States a threat than American youth were to give China the same label. The diffuse threats for Americans seems to indicate that in the coming years American youth will feel compelled to concentrate on several different threats at once, making it less likely that they will focus on China's foreign policy specifically. For their part, Chinese youth have a strong focus on the foreign policy of the United States, as their labeling of the United States as a threat seems to suggest. If the U.S. stokes a nationalist sentiment among this generation of Chinese youth through a controversial foreign policy decision now or in the future, it may initiate a worsening of bilateral ties. This is especially true if the Chinese government feels compelled to acquiesce to the nationalist pressure to preserve its legitimacy.



One explanation for this threat perception is that the vast majority of Chinese youth and a plurality of American youth think the other is at least somewhat likely to use military force to achieve their national goals (see figure 4). This is an area of concern for the bilateral relationship as this perception could easily precipitate miscalculation over the long-term. At the same time, future events are likely to further shape the perception of threat for both sides, since neither clearly labeled the other a partner or an enemy, meaning that threat perceptions could change quickly and drastically. For example, escalated tensions over the status of Taiwan, then the threat perception of U.S. and Chinese youth will change accordingly. Alternatively, greater cooperation over an issue such as climate change may lower mutual mistrust and shift perceptions in a positive direction. That is to say, it appears that American and Chinese youth will remain somewhat malleable in their perceptions of the bilateral relationship and immediate perceptions will be shaped more so by specific events.



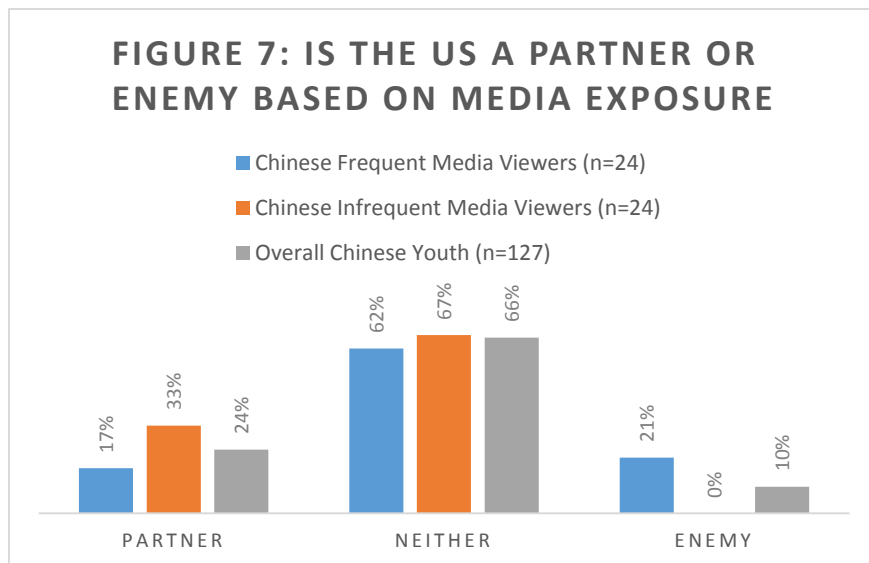
Avoiding tension as emphasized by the Golden Mean framework can be illustrated in the significant amount of Chinese youth in favor of cooperation with the United States in the economic realm (see figure 5). American youth as a whole were much less enthusiastic about economic cooperation relative to their Chinese counterparts. However, a majority of American youth still at least somewhat agreed with the idea. This suggest that economics is an area where bilateral cooperation can be relatively successful. High levels of economic integration between both sides, and both sides apparent willingness to cooperate economically can help to solidify a strong bilateral relationship through increased economic interdependence.



In the military realm, Chinese youth were almost just as enthusiastic about the prospect of cooperating with the United States as they were in the economic realm. This is a notable finding considering their view of the United States as the biggest threat to China (see figure 6). This data illustrates that in spite of some suspicions toward the United States, Chinese youth are not necessarily letting their suspicions influence their willingness to cooperate. This is an important development when comparing these views

to the current attitudes held by the military establishment, which appears to take a more hardline stance than the Chinese youth surveyed in this study. American youth, though, are far more hesitant, with a plurality disagreeing with the idea of Sino-American military cooperation. Even though the majority of American youth do not explicitly view China as an enemy, it is clear from their wariness to cooperate militarily that many implicitly believe it resembles an enemy. That is, if China was not seen in some way as an enemy or antagonistic toward the United States then one would expect more Americans to support military cooperation.

#### *Media Exposure and Perceptions*



For both Chinese and American youth, exposure to Sino-American relationship focused media correlated with negative feelings toward the other country (see figure 7). Among Chinese youth, those that were frequent media consumers, meaning they reported they keep up with news about the bilateral relationship at least daily, were more likely to label the United States an enemy than overall Chinese youth. Chinese youth who

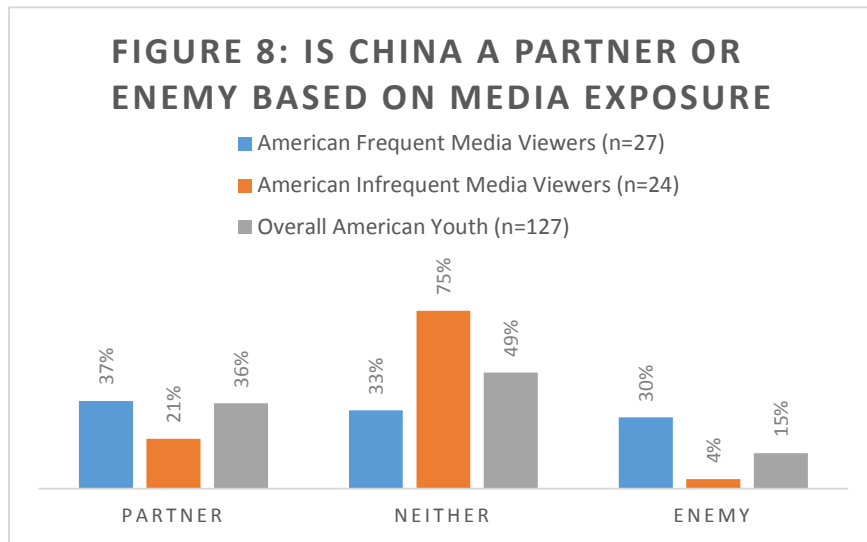
infrequent media consumers, meaning they reported they follow Sino-U.S. relations once a month or less made up about 21 percent of all respondents. Not a single infrequent media consumer from the Chinese group labelled the United States an enemy. Infrequent media consumers among Chinese youth also labeled the United States a partner slightly more than the overall youth and significantly more than frequent consumers.

In essence, the more Chinese youth are exposed to the media, the more negative their perception became of the United States. This suggests there exists a significant negative bias in Chinese state media toward the United States. Even with a potential negative bias, media exposure did not significantly impact whether Chinese youth were willing to cooperate with the United States either in the economic or military realm, as the percentages in all three groups were largely the same in these categories. One explanation for this dichotomy is that Chinese media whips up nationalist sentiment through negative portrayals of U.S. foreign policy, but then tempers those feelings by emphasizing the necessity of the bilateral relationship.

One focus group member retained skepticism of the media, though, indicating she “doesn’t know if media is the truth.” This sentiment reflects Shambaugh’s discussion of Chinese increasingly rejecting the media’s message (55), which may account for why the majority of Chinese youth indicated they are not daily consumers of media. Nonetheless, it appears that if the message of the CCP is casting a negative light on the United States, it is effective in shaping the opinions of those exposed to it.

American youth exposure to Sino-U.S. related media had a very similar result. American youth that were frequent media consumers, meaning they kept up with Sino-American relationship related media at least two to three times a week made up 20

percent of respondents. These frequent media consumers were much more likely to label China an enemy than infrequent media consumers and slightly more likely than the overall youth (see figure 8).



Infrequent media consumers, or those that kept up with Sino-American related media once a month or less, made up 24 percent of American respondents. The vast majority of infrequent media consumers chose not to label China an enemy or partner. While frequent media consumers were slightly more likely to label China a partner, this is possibly explained by the vast majority of infrequent consumers choosing “neither.” Moreover, frequent media consumers labeled China “partner” about on par with the overall youth. Overall, this seems to suggest that an increased frequency of consuming Sino-U.S. related media seems to cause a shift from labeling China “neither” to labeling them an “enemy.”

One explanation is that frequent media consumers were more than twice as likely as infrequent consumers to believe China will use military force. This provides credence to Pan’s view that U.S. media subtly builds an anti-China narrative. Still, like the

Chinese, media exposure did not have a significant effect on whether American youth believed the United States should increase cooperation with China in the economic or military realm. In all, heightened exposure to media related to the bilateral relationship is not an effective method to improve mutual perceptions.

## CHAPTER 4

### MILITARY AND ECONOMIC FUTURE

#### *First among Equals*

One of the defining debates of the Twenty First Century thus far has been predicting the extent of the upcoming shifts of power in the international system. Many analysts question the ability of the United States to retain its military and economic strength relative to China. At the same time, optimists of American strength just as forcefully argue that America will not be overtaken by China in the near future. And a range of opinions exist somewhere in between.

The National Intelligence Council (NIC) estimates that the United States' economy will be superseded by China as soon as the 2020s (98). Recent estimates predict 2024 as the year when China will have the largest nominal gross domestic product (IHS). The NIC predicts that the rise of China and other powers will effectively end America's "unipolar moment" of unmatched global hegemony (98). While the NIC predicts that the U.S. military will retain its superiority into 2030, this advantage will also fade as other states begin to catch up (99). At the same time, China will continue to increase its defense spending while the United States is forced to contend with a large debt-to-GDP ratio (Layne 22, 27). Layne argues these simultaneous trends will make it difficult for the United States to retain its status as world hegemon (30). Alternatively, the NIC indicates



that even in a more multipolar world, the United States will retain a status of “first among equals” (98).

A more optimistic analysis for U.S. preeminence finds that the United States is likely to preserve most of its current economic and military strength relative to China (Beckley 50, 75). Beckley predicts that China will face greater economic disruptions in the coming years due to a demographic shift which will create a drop-off in the labor market and ultimately crimp China’s growth (61). For Beckley, it is also unlikely that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), China’s military, will overtake the U.S. military. He contends that funding for the U.S. military produces more force-projecting power per dollar than equivalent investments in China’s PLA, and thus this multiplier disparity will be difficult for China to overcome (Beckley 74).

With this wide range of opinions, it is important to understand how these types of views, like Beckley’s and Layne’s, have been perceived among the youth populations in both countries, as the perceptions of the American population toward China is likely to have an influence crafting policies in the future (Niv-Solomon 13-14). Beckley argues that these perceptions have the potential to both help and harm the United States (77-78). For example, fear of China’s economic and military ascent may translate into policies that increase tension and increase the likelihood of conflict (Beckley 77). These include greater trade and immigration restrictions, which would strangle U.S. economic growth and actually help to facilitate America’s decline (Beckley 77). Alternatively, the perception of America’s decline may also lead to the adoption of policies that strengthen America’s position (Beckley 77). Beckley provides the parallel of fears toward the Soviet Union, which induced the creation of the interstate highway system (77) and the

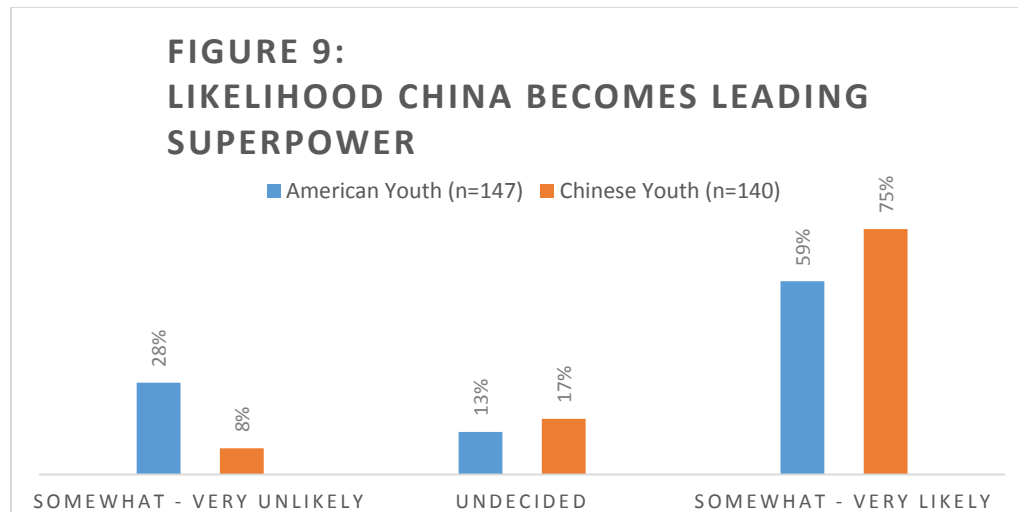
technological advances from the space race. Either way, it is important to understand the direction of these perceptions and what policies may spring up as a result.

### *Comparisons and Implications*

On nearly every measure, Chinese youth project higher confidence about China's prospects for the next two decades than American youth project about the United States' prospects. American youth tended to believe that the United States was in decline, while simultaneously believing that China was ascending as the world's new superpower.

Overall, the Chinese youth largely had the same predictions for the next two decades as American youth. The following results illustrate that while American and Chinese youth predictions for the future are similar, their optimism toward their country are starkly different:

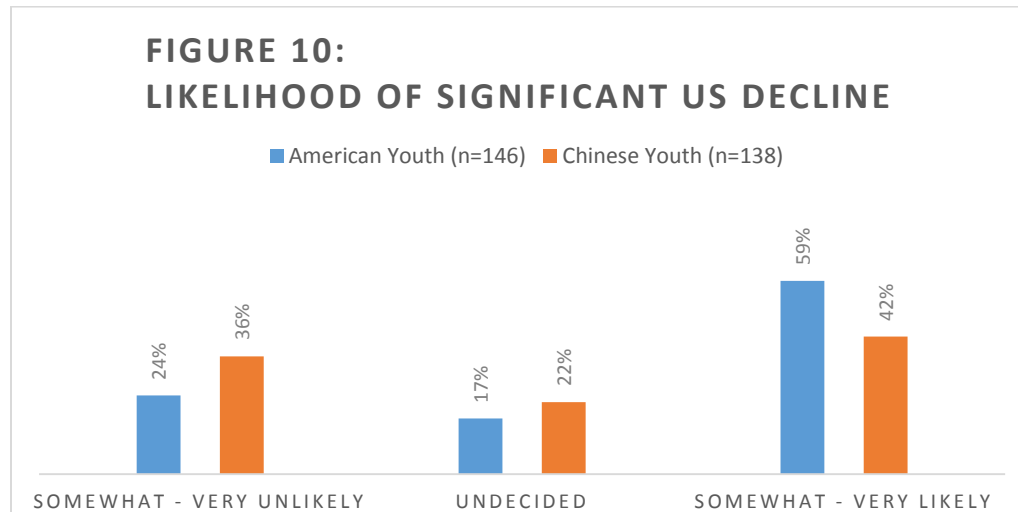
- Majorities of Chinese and American youth believe China is at least somewhat likely to become the world's leading superpower
- A majority of American youth think the U.S. will significantly decline in the next two decades
- Chinese youth are less inclined than Americans to believe the United States will decline



When asked whether China would become the leading superpower within the next two decades, majorities of American and Chinese youth said this was at least somewhat likely (see figure 9). This indicates that the narrative of China’s ascent has been absorbed by the youth. The perception that China will become the leading superpower may be interlinked with how the youth evaluate the economic situations in both states. Large majorities of American and Chinese youth believe China will surpass the United States’ economy in the next two decades.

Compared to the strength of their belief that China will surpass America’s economy, Chinese youth were less inclined to predict that China’s military will become the strongest in the next two decades, although a slim majority still did. Americans were also split on this question. In turn, youth on both sides seem to be predicting that the bulk of China’s influence will come from its economic rather than military might. Nonetheless, even as China’s economy grows many Chinese youth recognize this will not necessarily mean China will be dominant in every economic indicator. One focus participant said “In quantity China will surpass the United States, but on average we will

be still poor.” That is to say, the per capita income of China is likely to remain far below the United States for some time.



A majority of American youth also agreed that the United States would significantly decline over the next two decades (see figure 10). American youth were in fact more inclined to believe the United States is in decline than the Chinese youth, only a plurality of which agreed with this statement. Moreover, a much larger majority of Chinese youth believed their country will become the leading superpower than thought the U.S. will significantly decline. This seems to suggest that a portion of Chinese youth expect a bipolar or multipolar structure of the global power system, with America maintaining much of its power, but with China also gaining substantial strength. One focus group participant put the scenario as follows: “China wants to balance against America’s hegemony for world peace.” Beliefs about the current global perceptions of both country’s foreign policy may be influencing these predictions, as a majority of Chinese youth believe the world looks fondly upon their country’s foreign policy, while a majority of Americans believe just the opposite. As a result, the Chinese youth may

believe they have wider latitude to act on the international stage than their American counterparts.

This overall greater pessimism on the American side coincides with narratives in China and the United States that emphasize the two countries' relative ascent and decline. This confirms that the pessimism among that Beckley cautions against has trickled down into American youth. However, this finding leaves the question asked by Beckley still unanswered: how will the pessimism of American youth and the optimism of Chinese youth translate into policy?

## CHAPTER 5

### CHINESE AND AMERICAN PRIORITIES

#### *Security Discourse*

The priorities of China's and America's youth are intimately intertwined with the security discourse of both states. Traditionally, security has been narrowly conceptualized so as to concentrate only on military security (Inglehart and Norris 91). However, this definition is broadened to include human security as states develop and are exposed to longer periods of peace (Inglehart and Norris 91). In essence, if there is a "scarcity" of human security relative to military security, the former receives greater prioritization by society. The human security priorities outlined by Inglehart and Norris include protecting the environment and protecting human rights (Inglehart and Norris 92). This framework put forward by Inglehart and Norris illustrates why growing up in particular political contexts alters the policy priorities of a state's youth.

#### *Current Priorities*

Among Chinese elites, there is currently a debate over China's future and what goals to prioritize internally and externally. There is a serious discussion as to whether China should expand its presence overseas through establishing a greater number of military bases and alliances (NIC 63). How China prioritizes its foreign policy focus in

the coming years will likely determine their status as a global superpower as well (NIC 63).

Domestically, China is witnessing a similar transition in public opinion and government policy as the United States experienced in the 1960s (Gardner). Attitudes regarding environmental policy are beginning to shift away from prioritizing economic growth at the expense of the environment (Gardner). From 2008 to 2013 the number of Chinese adults that rated air pollution a “very big problem” jumped from 31 percent to 47 percent (Gardner). As a result, the Chinese government has instituted a range of environmental protection measures as part of its “war on pollution” (Gardner). When asked explicitly, a majority of Chinese now say that environmental protection should be prioritized even if it comes at the expense of economic growth (Yu and Pugliese).

American policy makers are also in a heated debate about the current and future foreign policy priorities of the United States. The Obama administration has dealt with an array of distinct crises, from Syria to Egypt (Mearsheimer 9). According to Mearsheimer, despite limited interests in most of these crises, the foreign policy establishment feels it has to prioritize interventionism abroad for security (10). This is in spite of the fact that the United States is very secure from a defense perspective (Mearsheimer 10). The pursuit of global dominance through interventionism necessarily deprioritizes other goals as it trades off with domestic economic development (Mearsheimer 10). Merry describes American foreign policy as oriented toward “humanitarian interventionism” (5-6). Merry indicates that this orientation is the favored option within the Obama administration in spite of opposition from the American public (5-6).

Americans, which have experienced a “scarcity” of economic growth in the past several years, and a relative “abundance” of environmental protection, have different concerns than the Chinese. The 2012 Chicago Council study found Americans put climate change at the bottom of a list of nine threats to the United States, and near the bottom of policy priorities for the United States (“Global Views” 8, 16). Preventing terrorism and nuclear proliferation were at the top of the list of priorities in the Chicago Council study (“Global Views” 16).

Both Chinese and American youth were asked to order a list of overall policies, including domestic and foreign policy, as well as a list of just foreign policies in the order of how they think they should be prioritized. The priorities with the greatest mean were the highest priorities, while those with lowest mean were the lowest priorities. If a policy had an equivalent mean, the list was sorted based on the lowest standard deviation as this illustrates there was more agreement among participants regarding that particular policy.

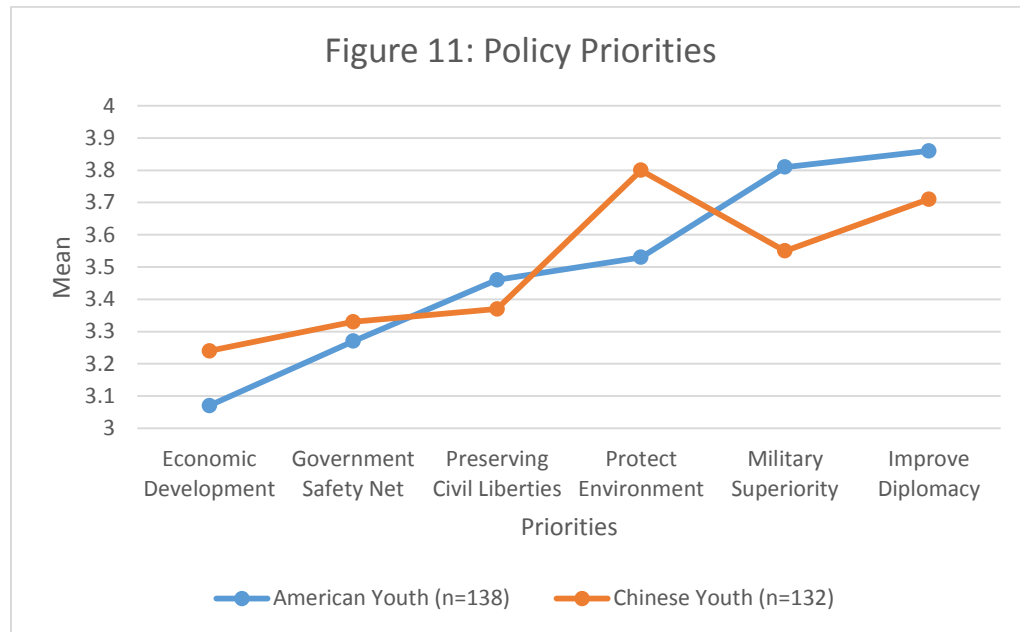
### *Comparisons and Implications*

Comparing the domestic and foreign policy priorities of American and Chinese youth produces results that will be important when evaluating the direction of each country in the coming decades. The following youth priorities are potentially indicative of an internally focused shift for the United States and an outward looking shift for China:

- Chinese youth largely prioritize foreign policy over domestic policies
- Chinese youth are willing to sacrifice economic growth for environmental protection



- Both American and Chinese youth are interested in maintaining their country's military



One of the most optimistic results is the overlapping commitment between American and Chinese youth to improving international diplomacy and cooperation as the first and second goal respectively (see figure 11). Both sides ranked this goal highly, once again demonstrating that the potential for finding areas of cooperation will remain strong in the coming years.

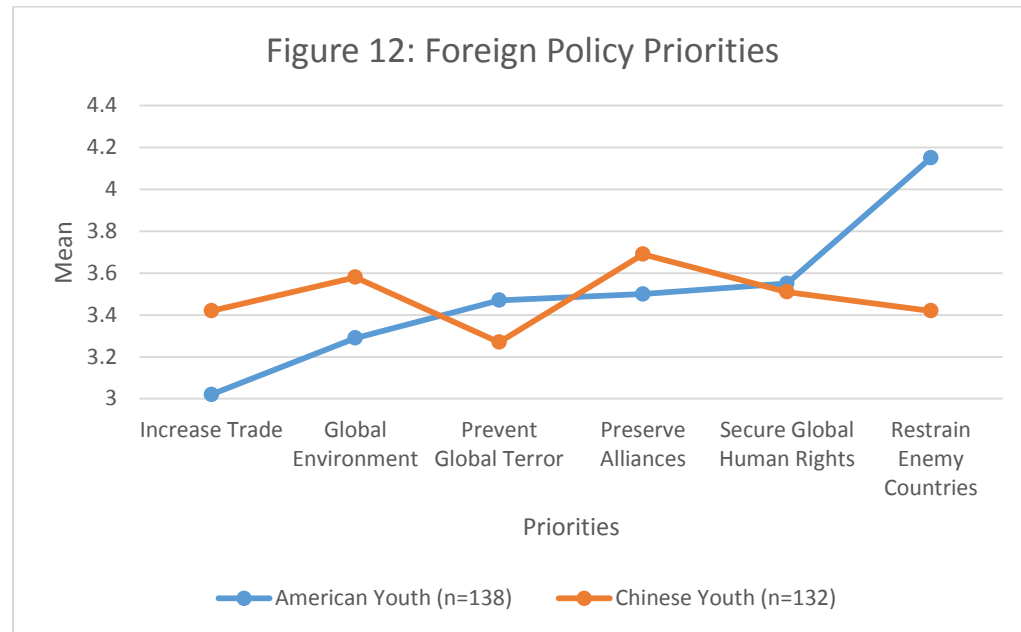
What is less promising for the Sino-U.S. relationship is a large commitment on both sides to maintain military might. This was third on Chinese youth's overall priorities, and second on the American's priorities. Greater buildup of arms will likely to contribute to mistrust between both sides and potentially fuel an arms race. It is important to note that while military superiority was listed as the second overall priority of American youth, there was significant disagreement among respondents. The standard

deviation of maintaining military superiority was nearly two, the highest on the list, which indicates a split among American youth regarding U.S. military dominance. With high levels of prioritization of international diplomacy and cooperation for both American and Chinese youth, though, it appears that the will for cooperation exists, the primary question is whether both sides will find substantive issues on which to cooperate.

On a list that contains domestic goals, such as a governmental safety net, the fact that Chinese youth prioritized foreign policy goals to the extent they did is significant because it demonstrates which side youth are leaning in the debate over domestic versus foreign priorities. This may be indicative of Chinese youth looking outward toward greater international influence, rather than prioritizing inward goals like a safety net and civil liberties. This analysis is further supported by the fact that Chinese youth placed maintaining military superiority as the third priority, another goal consistent with the idea that Chinese youth are interested in influence outside of China. This inward-outward distinction will be further explored in the following chapter.

For the Chinese youth, one domestic policy that overcame the importance of all other foreign policies was the protection of the environment. The results of this research show Chinese youth are prioritizing environmental protection over economic development. In fact, the first priority on the list was protecting the environment and the last priority was economic development. This conforms to Inglehart and Norris' argument that the scarcity or surplus of specific areas of "human security" can influence one's prioritization. China's consistent attainment of double-digit economic growth created a surplus in economic security, whereas the environmental destruction required to sustain such growth created scarcity in environmental security. Thus, Chinese youth

prioritization of the environment is a natural development under Inglehart and Norris' framework.



When asked to rank their foreign policy priorities, Chinese youth had several goals consistent with the current government and a few that contrasted (see figure 12). For instance, the first goal on the list was preserving China's alliances. China has only one official alliance with North Korea and participates in the Shanghai Cooperative Organization. It also has an array of unofficial alliances throughout the world. However, the prioritization of Chinese youth of alliances reflects a desire among some in China to use alliances as a strategic mechanism for international influence (Trigkas). Nonetheless, pursuing official alliances is still controversial among many Chinese elites because it conflicts with their rhetoric of non-alignment (Trigkas). One Chinese focus group participant demonstrated this sentiment, saying "China is currently defensive with its military. They should become more active and find allied countries."

For Chinese youth, “restraining enemy countries” was on the bottom half of the list of priorities. This shows that Chinese youth may wish to counter the China threat theory described by Pan of an intentional negative portrayal of China (23) while still pursuing international influence through less threatening mechanisms, like alliances rather than direct military posturing. American youth were far more interested in this goal, with an overwhelming number placing “restraining enemy countries” as the first priority, which may be a reaction to the large number of threats that American youth perceive. Since the majority of Americans did not label China an explicit enemy, this is not necessarily a cause for concern for the Sino-U.S. relationship. If China and the United States find a mutual foe, cooperating to contain such a threat could provide a potential area for cooperation due to the high level of American interest in this goal.

Improving the global environment was second on the list of foreign policy goals for Chinese youth, which is encouraging for those hoping for Chinese influence in pushing a global climate change regime. However, their American counterparts were less enthusiastic about protecting the global environment as a foreign policy goal. This gap in enthusiasm over protecting the environment likely means that China will have to convince Americans that preserving the global environment is in their interest in order to induce long-term cooperation over this goal.

One interesting element for Chinese youth was that they placed securing global human rights higher than they placed preserving their own domestic civil liberties. This may be reflective of Chinese youth attempting to promote a positive international image of China through prioritizing human rights abroad, while understanding that it will be difficult to prioritize domestically. There are a couple of important caveats to this

statistic. First, this does not mean Chinese youth are willing to defy international law in attempting to stop human rights violations, as a solid majority rejected doing so. Second, this also does not mean they are disinterested in protecting their own civil liberties just because it had a low prioritization. When asked if Chinese citizens should sacrifice some civil liberties for national security, a solid majority rejected this idea. This runs counter to the Chinese government's current prioritization of stability over civil rights.

## CHAPTER 6

### A NEW WORLD ORDER

#### *The Multipolar Moment*

The 2014 Chicago Council survey found that the number of Americans that said the United States should stay out of world affairs was the largest on record, at 41 percent (Smeltz 7). When Pew asked whether the United States should mind its own business, 52 percent said they agreed (“U.S. Foreign”). At the same time, the NIC predicts that the world will become multipolar, ultimately making international governance more difficult (48). Merry argues that Americans are shifting from global interventionism to internal nationalism as an ideological counterweight (8). As noted above, scholars have differing opinions about the likelihood of a grand shift in the current world order, and also have radically different opinions of how the United States and China should react to this potential shift.

As the world changes, so does China. Traditionally China has clung to Westphalian ideals of strict adherence to sovereignty and non-interference in other states’ affairs, largely to lend to credibility to its complaints against the United States and others interfering in “their affairs” (NIC 57). However, China is slowly shifting away from this rigid approach, as it involves itself in peacekeeping missions and other international efforts (NIC 57).

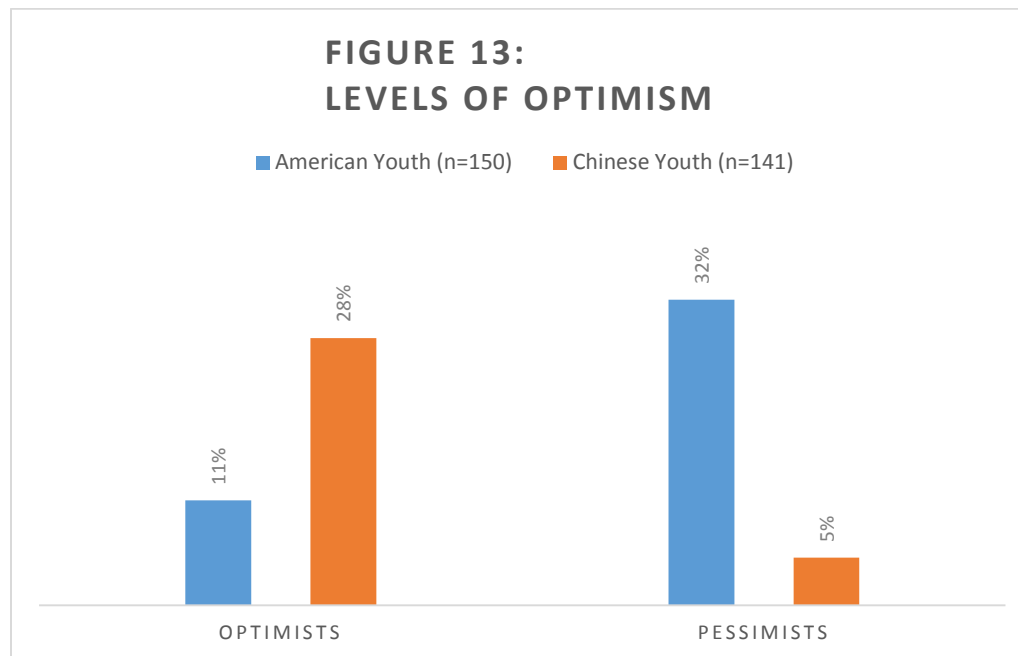
If the world transitions to a multipolar order, this could have significant implications for multilateral institutions since it may become more difficult to gather consensus without a dominant power (NIC 48, 57). Some argue it is important for the United States to accommodate a rising China to ensure a preservation of the existing multilateral order (Geeraerts). This system gives states a non-violent outlet to voice grievances against larger states and prevent larger states from exercising their dominance in an exploitative manner, such as through multilateral monitoring and sanctions (Lake 477-478). Luckily for the maintenance of the multilateral order, many analysts believe that as it currently stands, China will integrate into these multilateral institutions since it has so far had positive experiences in these regimes (Sohn 78). China's push for the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement suggest that China is attempting to expand rather than limit multilateralism (Kuik 109-110). Even when China attempts to shape the multilateral order in its image, it does so in an incredibly cautious manner (Wuthnow et al. 284). The NIC also contends that China does not wish to replace the international system, it just wants a greater role as its global influence rises (105). As such, it appears China's current trajectory is to increase its global involvement but not at the expense of the world order.

### *Comparisons and Implications*

In comparing youth in China and America, what stands out first is the number of "optimists" in China, and the number of "pessimists" in the United States. In this research, those classified as optimists chose "very likely" and pessimists chose "very unlikely" to at least one of the following: Over the next two decades either America's influence will significantly decline, China will have the greatest global influence, China will have the biggest economy, or China will have the most powerful military. In general,

Chinese youth's belief of China's ascension, and American youth's perception of America's decline has influenced the preferred policy direction of both sides:

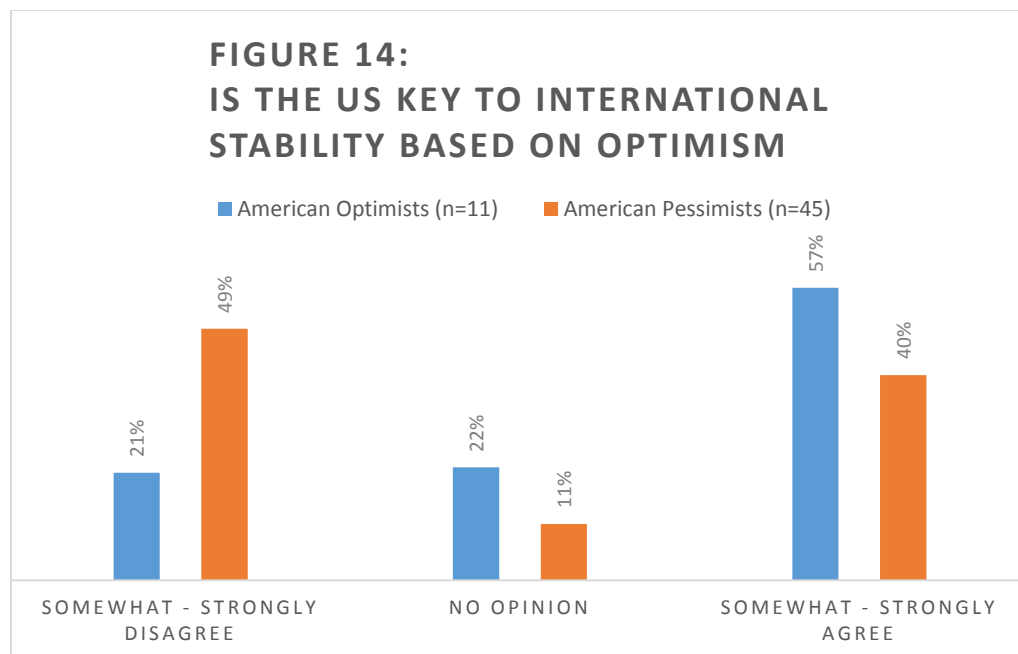
- Majorities of both sides' youth disagree with increasing military spending, but American youth more strongly lean in this direction
- Chinese youth are much more likely to perceive their country as crucial to global stability than American youth
- Strong majorities of both sides' youth would prefer to focus on domestic issues before international issues, but Chinese youth were more split than Americans
- Pessimistic American youth were more likely to turn inward in their policy preferences while optimistic Chinese youth turned outward



For China's youth, their greater level of optimism translates into expanding China's influence beyond its current state. For American youth, their pessimism has meant a preference toward a diminished role for America in international relations,



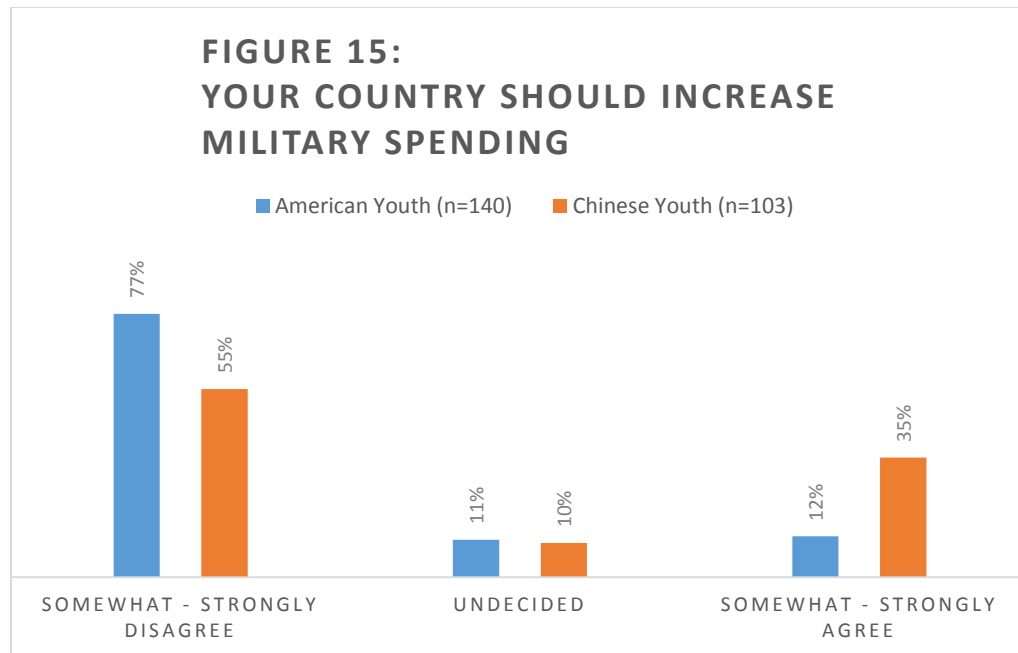
especially in military contexts. Among the overall respondents, in nearly every way, Chinese youth were more willing to engage in policies that would expand China's international influence than were American youth. This data begins to answer Beckley's question of how American youth's pessimistic attitudes affect their policy preferences. Additionally, the data provides insight into how Chinese youth's optimism affects their policy preferences as well.



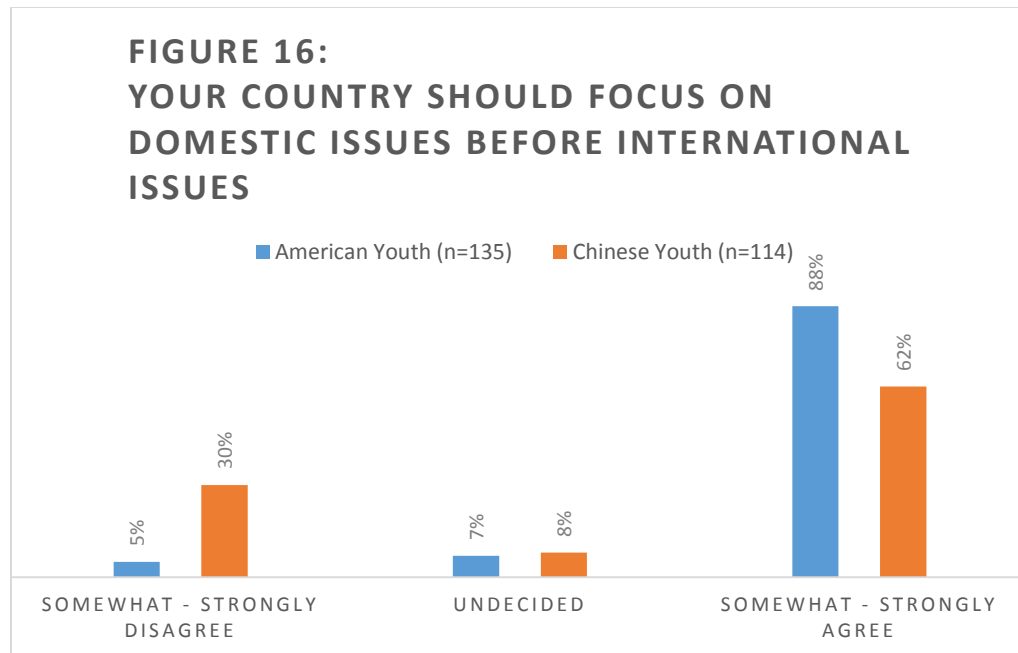
This research finds that greater pessimism among American youth correlates with more inward-looking policies, the opposite result that Beckley had desired (77). For Chinese youth the inverse result is true: Increased optimism among Chinese youth correlated with increased willingness to engage the international community (see figure 14). For example, American youth that were pessimistic were more likely to believe the United States is not crucial to international stability. This seems to suggest a relationship between one's predictions of future global developments, and how American youth view the importance of the United States internationally. Overall, the specific policy

preferences were similar between optimists and pessimists in both the United States and China. However, their relative optimism or pessimism did influence the strength of these preferences for these groups. That is, greater pessimism diminished both sides' support for international engagement, and greater optimism increased their support for this engagement.

These attitudes and preferences are likely impacted by the substantially different contexts experienced by Chinese and American youth. American youth have witnessed the United States' deep involvement in international affairs, while Chinese youth are just now experiencing China as a world power. As such, American youth feel more inclined to relinquish a portion of its international participation, since they have so far experienced an abundance of such engagement. At the same time, Chinese youth desire to expand this engagement because China's participation has been infrequent throughout its history. Moreover, these relative perceptions are likely a result of the changing global power distribution. With China's international influence and power growing, and the perception that the United States is growing weaker, the attitudes of both sides' youth may be reflective of such a power shift.



The fact that American youth were largely unified in rejecting increased military spending showcases their attitudes regarding this shift in global power (see figure 15). Chinese youth were more split on this proposal which reinforces the idea that power-based factors have increased their desire for a stronger China. These attitudes are likely a reflection of the current power gap between the U.S. and the rest of the world. There is more less impetus for American youth to pursue military expenditures in order to erase this gap, since they already feel a high degree of military security. Chinese youth were also split as to whether China should involve itself in other countries' conflicts, whereas Americans were solidly against involvement. Moreover, Chinese youth were more willing to participate in multilateral institutions than American youth. These results further confirm that Chinese youth are not completely persuaded by the Westphalian ideals adhered to by China in the past. One focus group participant illustrated this feeling when she said, "[China] should take the responsibility of a great country."



The inward shift of the American youth was most clearly demonstrated in their prioritization of domestic issues over international issues (see figure 16). When specifically asked, the vast majority of American youth said their country should focus on domestic affairs. While the majority Chinese youth also lean toward a domestically oriented focus, there is a significant minority that will pull China outward.

These relative attitudes of American and Chinese youth invert what many observers believe are the current roles of the United States and China. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been considered the world's global hegemon, with all of the accompanying benefits and obligations. By contrast, on the world stage, China is known for declaring the inviolability of sovereignty and preaching the virtue of non-interference in other states' affairs. It seems that those roles may be at least slightly altered by the next generation of youth on both sides.

This research also begins to address Beckley's question of what policy preferences correlate with optimistic and pessimistic attitudes (77). Beckley indicated that American's pessimistic attitudes could generate either positive or negative outcomes for America's position in the world (77). Based on the responses in this survey, the opposite of Beckley's desired outcome was the reality. That is to say, those that were more pessimistic among the American youth had a greater tendency to focus on domestic priorities at the expense of international engagement. The optimistic Chinese youth were an inverse reflection of their American counterparts - they had a greater willingness to engage the international community. Future research should explore the direction of causality by asking: do policy preferences shape how one perceives the future, or does one's perception of the future shape policy preferences.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

#### *Creating Commonalities*

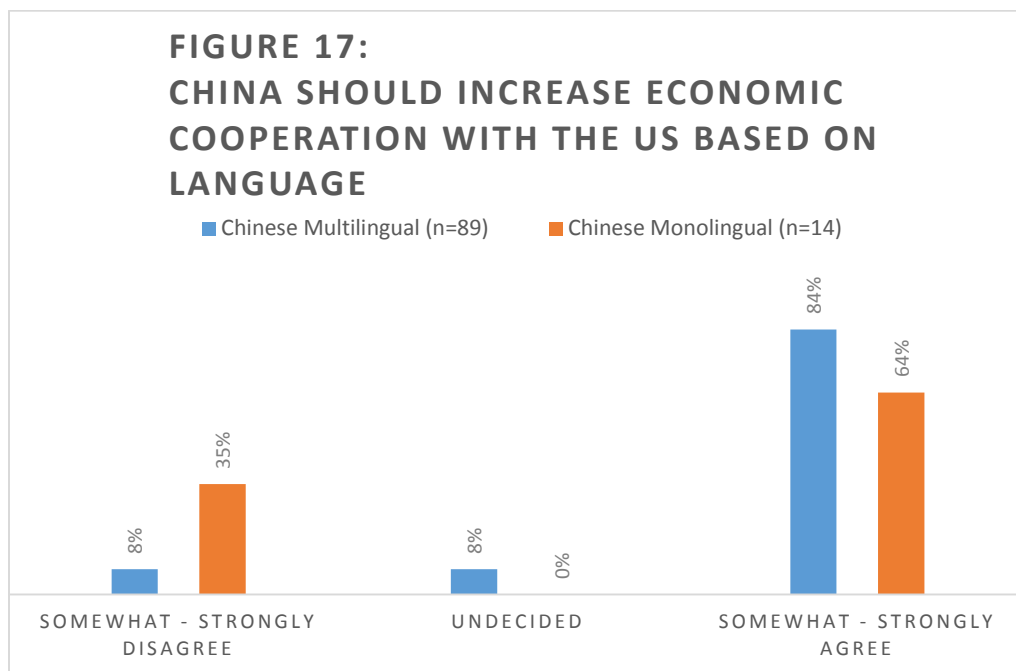
Recent literature has begun exploring the link between multilingual abilities and perceptions about the world. Often those that have learned more than one language are also more likely to be tolerant of other societies and cultures. This is because language can serve as a tool to provide commonalities in experience (Wong and Motha 62). As such, understanding multiple languages can help individuals overcome xenophobia and racism and shape how multilingual learners interact with the world (Wong and Motha 62). This research does not control for the specific second language participants had studied, but rather whether they have studied a language for more than two years. Ultimately, the attitudes and perceptions of Chinese and American language learners helped legitimize Wong and Motha's claims.

#### *Comparisons and Implications*

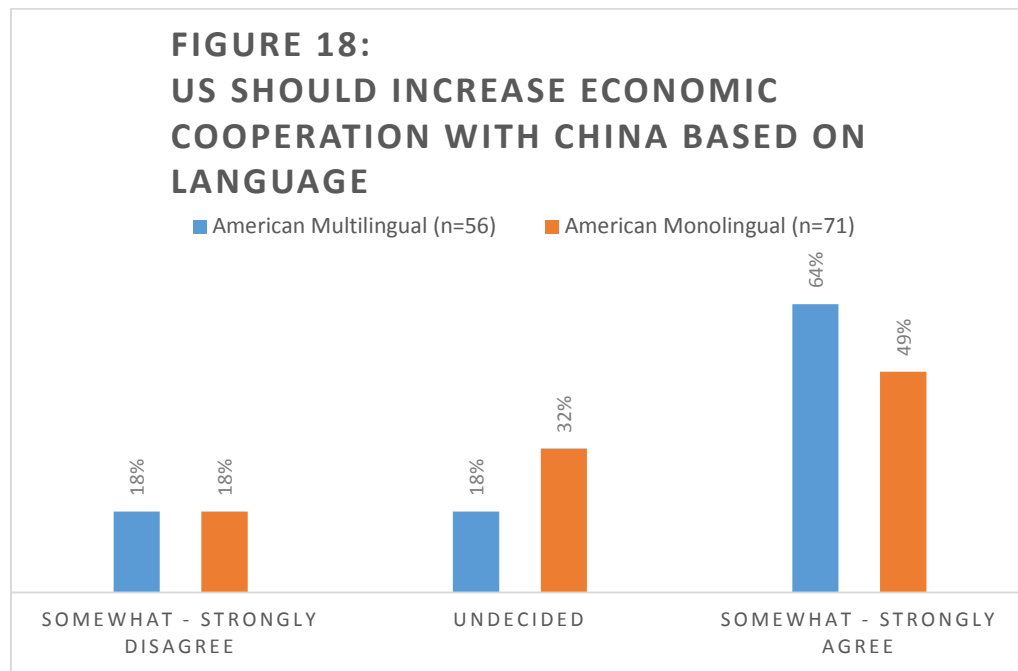
About 45 percent of American youth respondents could be classified as "language learners" as they reported they had studied a language for more than two years. The rest said they had studied a maximum of two years or less. Chinese youth were far more likely than their American counterparts to learn an additional language to their mother tongue. About 81 percent of Chinese youth said they learned a language for more than

two years and the rest said they had studied a maximum of two years. For both American and Chinese youth, learning an additional language appears to provide benefits to a stable Sino-U.S. relationship. Unlike media exposure to news about Sino-U.S. relationship, which had a negative impact on mutual perceptions and had no impact on willingness to cooperate, language learning not only correlated with increased positive perceptions, but also improved the willingness to cooperate for both:

- Both sides' language learners were more likely to label the other country a "partner"
- Both sides' non-language learners were more likely to label the other country an enemy
- Both sides' language learners were more willing to engage in economic cooperation



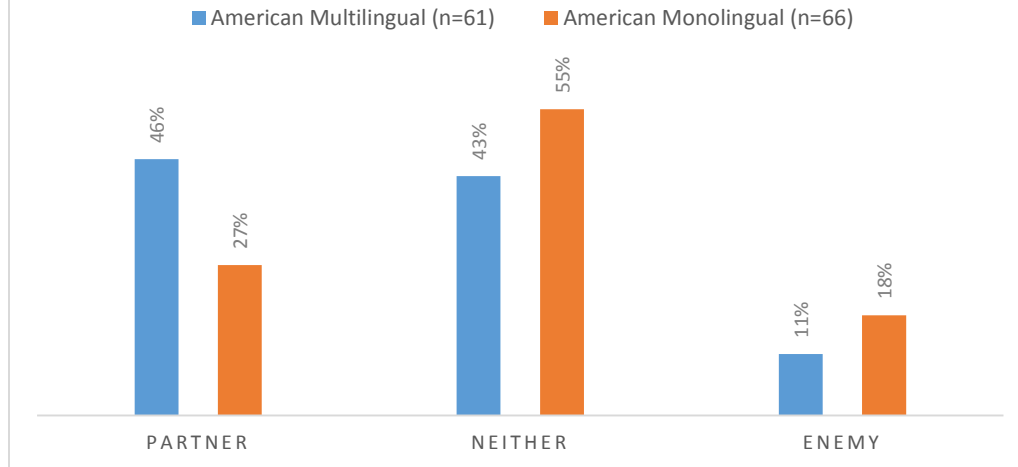
While the majority of both non-language learners and language learning Chinese agreed with the idea of increasing economic cooperation with the United States, there was a substantial increase in willingness to cooperate if the surveyed subjects had studied another language.



For American youth, there was also a significant correlation in their willingness to cooperate in the economic realm with China. Although the correlation was not as dramatic as it was for their Chinese counterpart. Those with the ability to speak more than one language may be more likely to consider the positive economic benefits of cooperating with foreign countries over economics. However it is not just economic considerations that language impacts. Increased language learning also correlated with both sides' youth becoming more willing to cooperate on military affairs as well.

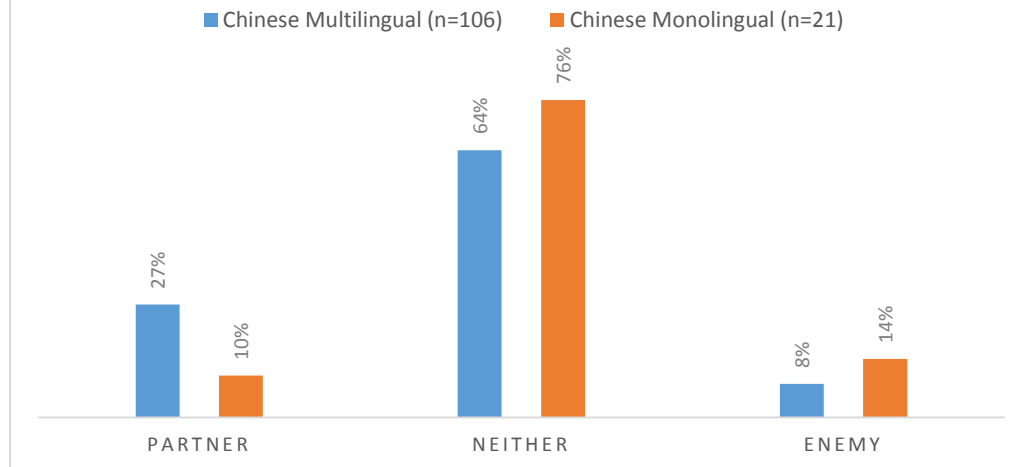


**FIGURE 19:  
IS CHINA A PARTNER OR ENEMY BASED ON  
LANGUAGE**



The greater willingness to cooperate on military and economic affairs is perhaps explained by the increased positive perceptions for both American and Chinese language learners compared to non-language learners. Exposure to additional languages increases the likelihood of exposure to positive experiences with foreigners, which may explain the correlation between language learning and positive perceptions.

**FIGURE 20:  
IS THE US A PARTNER OR ENEMY BASED ON  
LANGUAGE**



This study cannot provide insight as to whether those that are more inclined to positive perceptions of other cultures, like China, are also more likely to take language in the first place, or if exposure to other languages is what helped precipitate their positive outlook. However, the consistent and significant differences for both American and Chinese youth seem to suggest it is at least partially the latter. Learning other languages also provides exposure to the ideas, history and cultures of other countries, thus providing a foundation for greater understanding. Based on these results, greater U.S. investment in Chinese language training and student exchange between Americans and Chinese youth may produce a more cooperative Sino-U.S. relationship and promote mutual understanding.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

As this generation's youth prepares to enter positions of leadership tomorrow both the United States and China will experience dramatic changes in their bilateral relationship as well as their international standing. This may be the result of a combination of real shifts in the relative power of America and China as well as perceptual shifts among the populations in both countries, in particular among the youth. These perceptual shifts have created a generation of Chinese youth optimistic about China's rise and a generation of American pessimists toward America's decline. These shifts in perception have induced a reorientation of how youth believe their country should formulate their foreign and domestic policies. Chinese youth are relatively more interested in expanding China's influence abroad, while American youth are ready to scale back some of America's obligations -- particularly in the military realm. However, Chinese and American youth are not necessarily responding to the shift in the international system with a desire to aggressively buildup their arms, since majorities reject greater military spending and affirm multilateral participation. Additionally, China's ascent will not necessarily remake the Western international system, and America's descent will not necessarily entail its withdrawal from multilateral engagement. The attitudes of these youth seem to predict a more nuanced outcome - one

where China takes a greater role in the existing world system, and America draws back on some of its military commitments.

Maintaining the Sino-U.S. relationship will require a delicate balance on both sides. Since China is seeking a greater role in the international system, the United States will have to become more accommodating toward China's participation if it wants to maintain or improve its relationship to the greatest extent possible. Moreover, Chinese youth are likely to particularly focus on provocative actions from the United States due to their focus on America as China's biggest state threat, such as the U.S. pivot to Asia, or arms sales to Taiwan. This is especially dangerous since both American and Chinese youth believe the other is willing to utilize military force. The United States will have to ensure it takes extra caution in crafting its policy toward China so as not to create scenarios susceptible to miscalculation and conflict. Even with these challenges, there are an array of areas where cooperation can overcome mutual suspicions. Majorities of both were willing to engage in economic cooperation, but American youth were disinterested in military cooperation. And both prioritized international diplomacy as a policy goal. These seemingly contradictory trends paint a picture similar to the status quo. The bilateral relationship will remain complex, tense and suspicions will remain, but youth on both sides have the desire to continue cooperation regardless.

Simply exposing Chinese and American youth to media regarding the other country is not a successful strategy in improving positive perceptions. In fact, greater media exposure is more likely to negatively impact mutual perceptions than to improve them. An effective strategy for integrating Chinese and American youth and maintaining the bilateral relationship in the future is increased language exchange and study abroad

opportunities for both sides. This research has demonstrated that increased language learning correlates with improved cross-country images perceptions and an increased willingness to embrace cooperation.

This study could be improved by expanding responses to improve the likelihood that the results are fully reflective of youth in both countries. Moreover, including American focus groups as well would help provide context to the American side of the data. As stated in the limitation section, ensuring that participation is not limited based on internet access would help make sure the data is not skewed toward those that are more affluent.

There are many areas that can be further explored to add to this research. Future studies should control for whether language learning improves perceptions of other cultures, or whether those that are more tolerant of other cultures are predisposed to language learning. This could be pursued through following language learners before and after learning a second language and then determining if their perceptions changed after taking language classes for a period of time. Additionally, determining whether there is a difference in perceptions based on what language a student is learning may be another avenue for research. For example, Americans learning Mandarin may be especially inclined to have positive perceptions of China. Future studies could also determine whether there is a difference in perception based on whether respondents receive most of their information from social media or traditional media platforms. Finally, questions could be expanded to include demographic questions to determine if education, class, or region had an effect on attitudes.

This research provides insight into an often overlooked aspect of international relations. The dispositions of youth provide unique insight into the future of the Sino-U.S. relationship. To determine how well the findings of this research reflects other studies' findings on this subject, the conclusions should be compared to research of the general public and academic opinion in both countries, as well as specific research that compares Chinese and American youth. There is a growing academic and public consensus that, in the future, China will take on a greater role in international affairs while America's role diminishes (Dugan; NIC 98-99). The dispositions of youth in this survey conform to the general public's view and the breadth of literature that predicts China's rise and America's descent. Chinese youth in this survey also reflected a trend in Chinese foreign policy circles toward partial abandonment of non-interference in other states' affairs. American youth are aligned with the general American public, which has been skeptical of foreign policy adventurism (Merry 5-6), and at the same time reject the foreign policy establishment which consistently endorses military interventions (Mearsheimer 10). This appears to be part of an attitudinal shift inward in the literature, since the American youth in this survey agreed with the general public which increasingly thinks the United States should stay out of world affairs (Smeltz 7). It appears the opinions of youth in China and the United States are essentially exaggerated forms of the trends in opinion seen among the general public; the current attitudes of youth in the United States and China can provide a window into the future, illustrating how this shift in global power is affecting the next generation's attitudes.

This research contains significant similarities and some differences with one study that also compared Chinese and American youth. Shostya and Morreale interviewed

youth in both countries and found that like youth in this study, a majority of both thought China is gaining strength relative to the United States, and both sides were willing to pursue economic cooperation (196-197, 194). One key difference is that American youth were more optimistic that the United States will retain its economic lead than those surveyed in this study (Shostya and Morreale 193). While this study measured second language ability and its relationship with perception, Shostya and Morreale analyzed tourism between America and China and its ability to improve perceptions. Their analysis found that Chinese and American youth visiting their counterpart's country improved impressions of the other state (Shostya and Morreale 196), similar to the effect of learning a second language.

The youth in this survey also fit well in the framework established by Inglehart and Norris, which described the differing conceptions of security based on context (91). Chinese youth were more oriented toward environmental protection, while American youth desired greater economic growth. In this area, the attitudes of Chinese youth align with the general public in China, which also increasingly prioritize environmental protection (Gardner). As such, it appears youth priorities are largely determined by the context of their upbringing.

Dramatic shifts in the international system can be complex and may often seem contradictory. Youth opinion in the world's two greatest superpowers not only helps provide insight into the changing Sino-U.S. relationship but also enables policy makers to make education predictions on how each state will respond to this power shift in the future. In order to ensure a stable transition to the new world order, policymakers must

take proactive steps to assess how other powers will react to these changes in relative power.



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